826 828 [827]

taboo by cutting its buds (see p. 43). The altars of the fields and of agricultural societies, too, watch over the "head of the millet."

/66/ and purified in order to maintain his health and prosperity. It is the seat of consciousness and will, and receives a share of the scarifications made at birth, which will exercise influence on the person.

826 Hair contains an important part of the individual's ni. It is therefore dangerous to mix it with the hair of another, for that would create a vital and indissoluble bond between the two parties. To burn it is equivalent to making an attempt on one's own life. It is buried or placed in a deep hole in the wall of the house for protection (1).

[832 789]

1. Many charms and magic spells are based on hair. In order to be loved by a woman, a man must mix some of her hair with his and place it under his head at night with a prayer. In order to keep his job, an employee does the same with his hair and that of his employer; he then sacrifices a victim over the ensemble so that the employer cannot fire him without risking his own life.

Hair and the pilose system play a part in the myth and were used to count the age of primitive men until the advent of death on earth. All the ancestors represented in the sanctuaries are bearded and hairy. Their appearance shows that, having become mortal, they lived at a time when rejuvenation no longer existed.

826 827 The pupil is the fundamental part of the eye. Its name, nyemani, "little person of the eye" (2), expresses its function. The pupil re-

2. Man's pupil, according to information that is still obscure, was made with that of the serpent and was also called nye mani sa, "serpent of the little person of the eye."

flects and absorbs the person it sees. The image is a kind of double,

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1. The Marriage Proposal (1)

1. The procedures described here apply to the marriage of a young girl. For widows or divorcées who remarry, there are consultations of diviners, sacrifices to the evil fetishes, etc., but the betrothal and wedding ceremonies are performed with a minimum of show.

832 581 The Bambara are not unmoved by the beauty of a woman's form; they can distinguish a well-formed body from a malformed one, a pretty woman from an ugly one, and they find a coppery skin more attractive than one of ebony black. Similarly, a face pitted by smallpox or a bosom covered with scars displeases them, and a man talks to you about his fiancée or his wife, he is quite proud to be able to say: "sien si t'a la, she has a body without blemish," therefore she is beautiful. When it comes to marriage, however, he does not look too closely! He readily keeps silent about his tastes and seldom consults his heart, for a wife to him is primarily a source of pleasure and profit. /200/

581 What he sees in a woman above all is a being of a different sex than he, and if she is industrious, cooks well, and is good at business, he will know how to close his eyes to her defects in order to keep her and allow her to be an important person in his home who must be reckoned with.

584 When a Negro who wants a wife finds an unbetrothed girl, he quickly confides his secret, his fears and hopes, to his close friend, a man of mature age who enjoys some respect in the country (1). The

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1. Some people have thought that the "storytellers /griots/" act as intermediaries in asking the hand of a child. Nothing is more